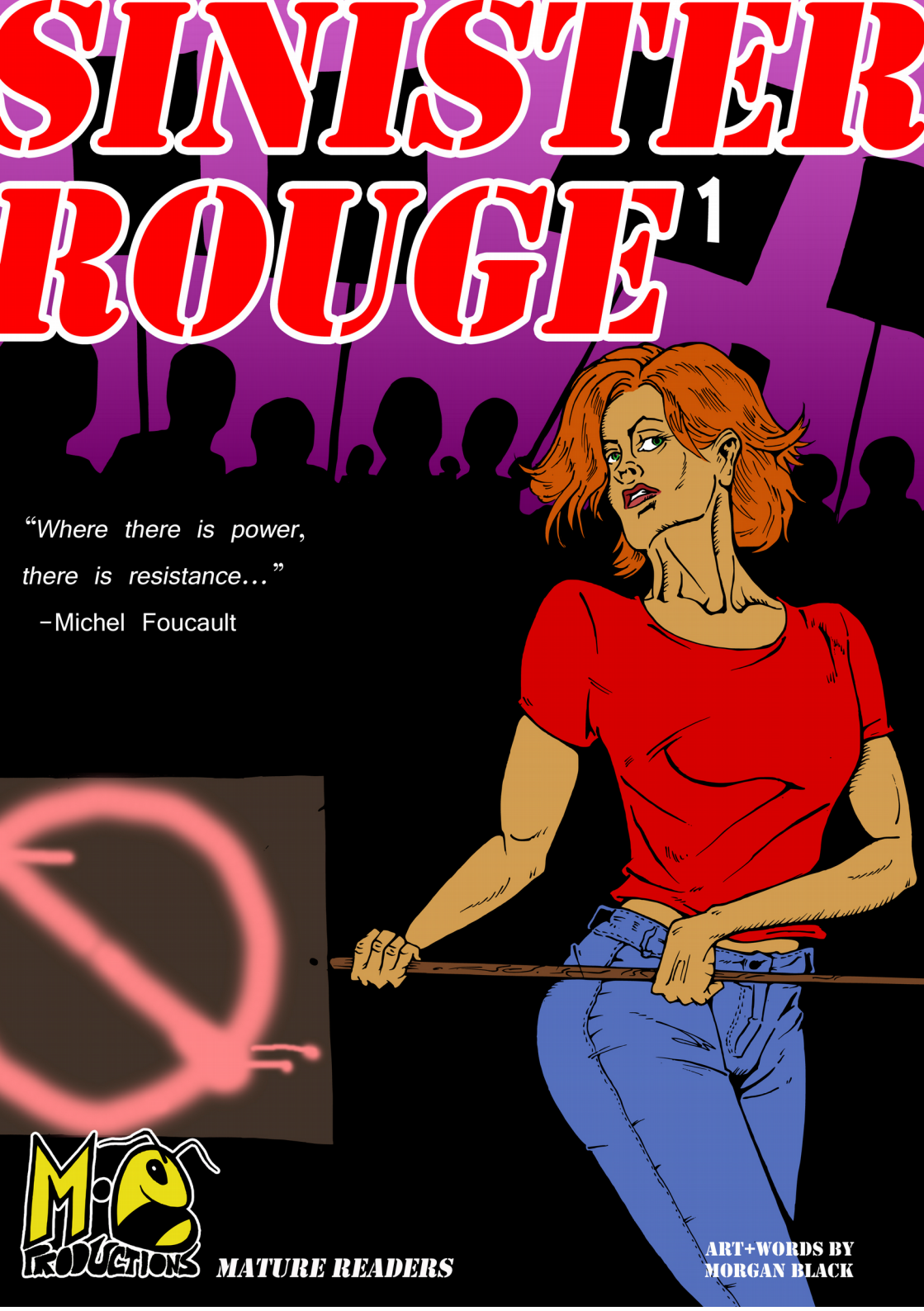
SINISTER ROUGE 1



MATURE READERS

ART+WORDS BY
MORGAN BLACK

FRANKIE.

That's my name, the only name I use now.

Short for a name my parents gave me, which I never liked.

I always preferred this version, with its hard consonant in the centre...I guess it reflected my own self, as well. Somebody who started off as one thing, decided it wasn't their bag, and changed it to reflect how they really felt. People used to tell me, "That's a boy's name!", and I'd be like, "So?"

Nobody could get it that I actually felt more like a boy than a girl.

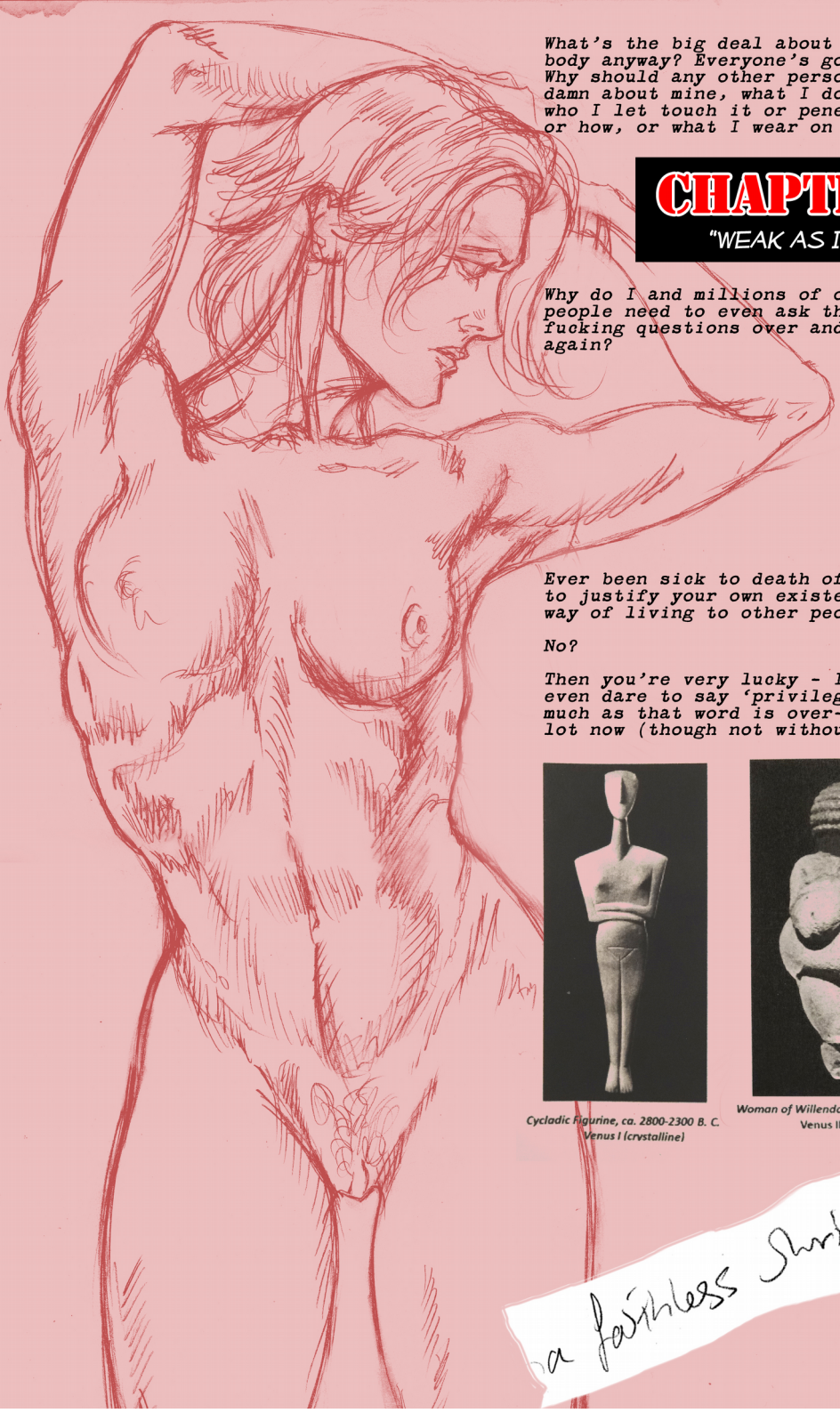
And when you're first getting to grips with life-changing ideas like that, it makes you feel as if you're the only person in the world thinks that way, that you're 100% some kind of freak, and some people are going to dedicate their lives to making you believe that and make you suffer for it.

Every fucking day.

Well, I wasn't the only one.

That, at least, was an improvement over my starting point. The rest, unfortunately, all turned out to be true.

So I decided I would dedicate my life to fighting back against those who made me feel like just a random scribble in the margins. This, as they say, was war.....



What's the big deal about a human body anyway? Everyone's got one. Why should any other person give a damn about mine, what I do with it, who I let touch it or penetrate it or how, or what I wear on it?

CHAPTER 1

"WEAK AS I AM..."

Why do I and millions of other people need to even ask these fucking questions over and over again?

Ever been sick to death of having to justify your own existence and way of living to other people?

No?

Then you're very lucky - I would even dare to say 'privileged', as much as that word is over-used a lot now (though not without reason).

Cycladic Figurine, ca. 2800-2300 B. C.
Venus I (crystalline)

Woman of Willendorf, ca. 2800-2500 B. C.
Venus II (vegetable)

a faithless Shrine

Psychologists like to talk about how "children" develop, as if every kid grows up exactly the same, with the exact same experiences, fears, hang-ups and anxieties.

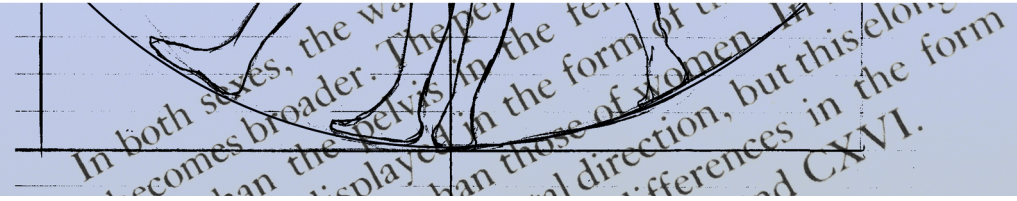
I knew from a really early age that my Welsh Mum didn't have body parts that my Nigerian Dad had - or he had stuff she didn't - and it didn't affect me in any way. I never envied what he had or feared it, or felt jealous of him giving it to my Mum and not to me.

In fact they pretty much left me to do what I wanted to, within reason, until the age when it came down to me being expected to start "finding someone", 'cos that was what all the other girls in my class were talking about. Yep, boys.

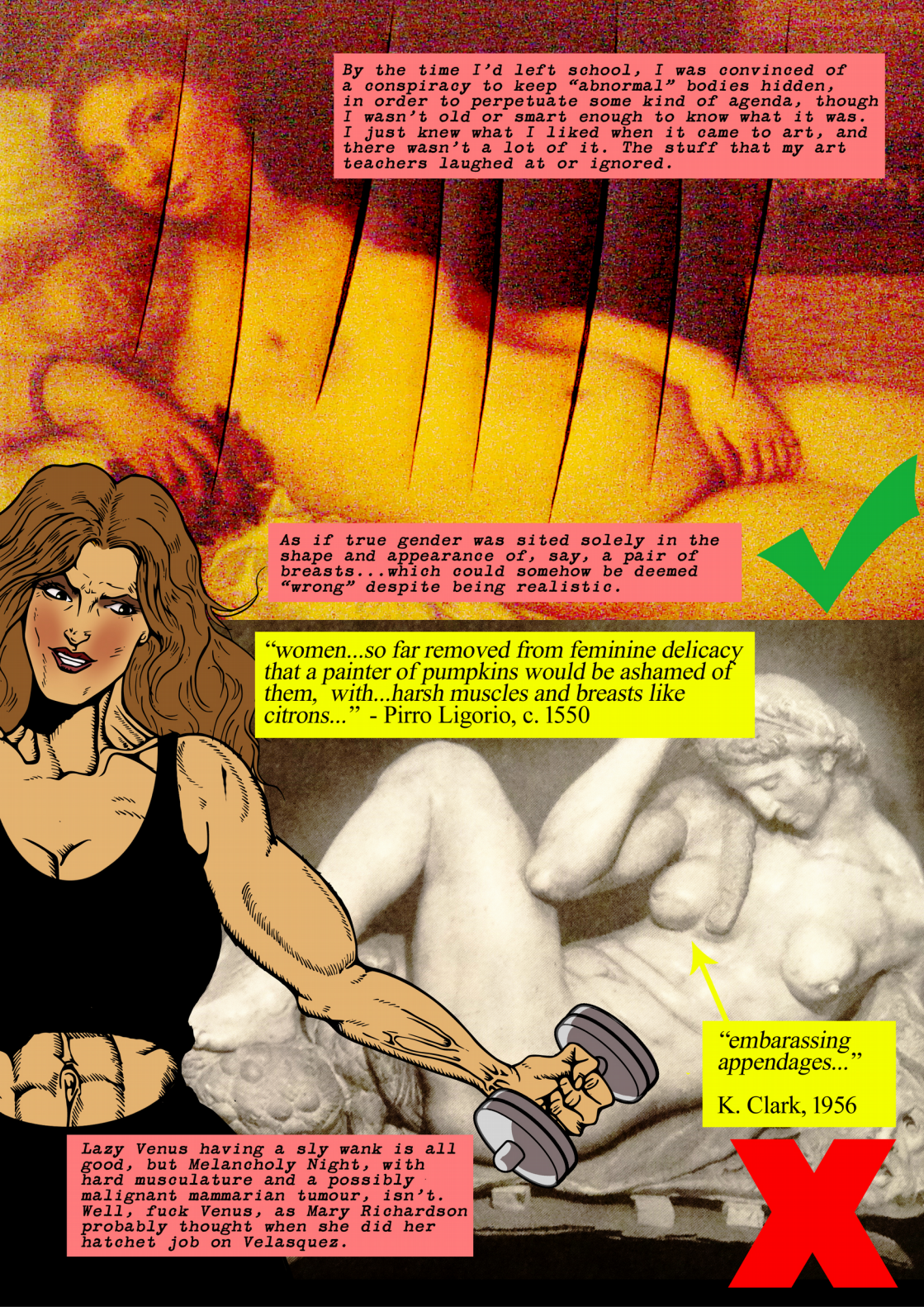
And while they got all bothered about Jack or Christopher, I was sitting by myself in the corner thinking, "Actually, I think Jacqueline Rubinstein, the captain of the school netball team, is hot as fuck..." But what the hell was I supposed to do about that?

Inevitably my lack of breast development, scruffy hair and disinterest in guys got me called a 'dyke' and slapped around in the gym changing rooms. Somebody once even yanked my pants down to prove to everyone that I had a dick...I think I was marginally less embarrassed than she was.

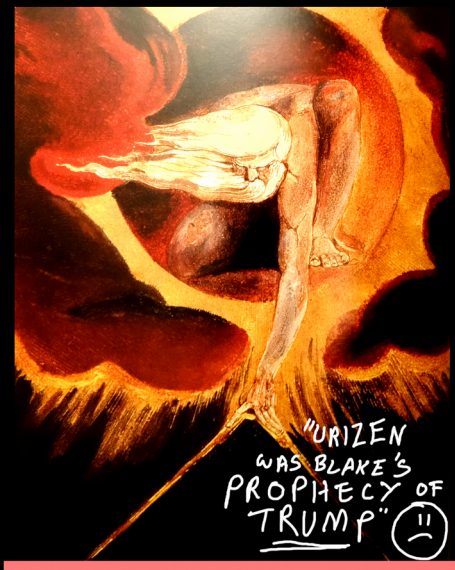
That was when I started to really question the body I had been given, and how I felt about it...and those who made me feel bad about it.



Left — Leonardo's study
of a man (far left) compares
well proportionally with his
well-known Vitruvian Man
drawing (left) of c.1490.
GLOSS
I didn't see myself in any of the images of ideal form which were served up to me.
And the more I saw of what was supposed to be the norm, the beautiful, the perfect, the more it pissed me off.
Why couldn't Aphrodite have had tits as small as mine?
Or Helen of Troy been ginger?
Or mixed race for that matter?
Who was to say that my form was any less - or more - perfect than some photographer's - or sculptor's - made-up rules of bodily perfection?

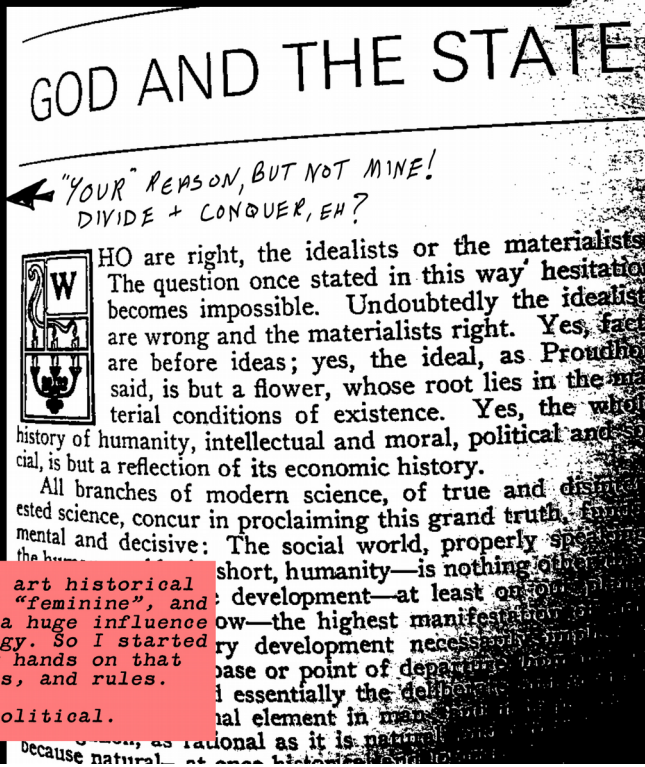

By the time I'd left school, I was convinced of a conspiracy to keep "abnormal" bodies hidden, in order to perpetuate some kind of agenda, though I wasn't old or smart enough to know what it was. I just knew what I liked when it came to art, and there wasn't a lot of it. The stuff that my art teachers laughed at or ignored.
As if true gender was sited solely in the shape and appearance of, say, a pair of breasts...which could somehow be deemed "wrong" despite being realistic.
"women...so far removed from feminine delicacy that a painter of pumpkins would be ashamed of them, with...harsh muscles and breasts like citrons..." - Pirro Ligorio, c. 1550
"embarassing appendages..."
K. Clark, 1956
Lazy Venus having a sly wank is all good, but Melancholy Night, with hard musculature and a possibly malignant mammarian tumour, isn't. Well, fuck Venus, as Mary Richardson probably thought when she did her hatchet job on Velasquez.

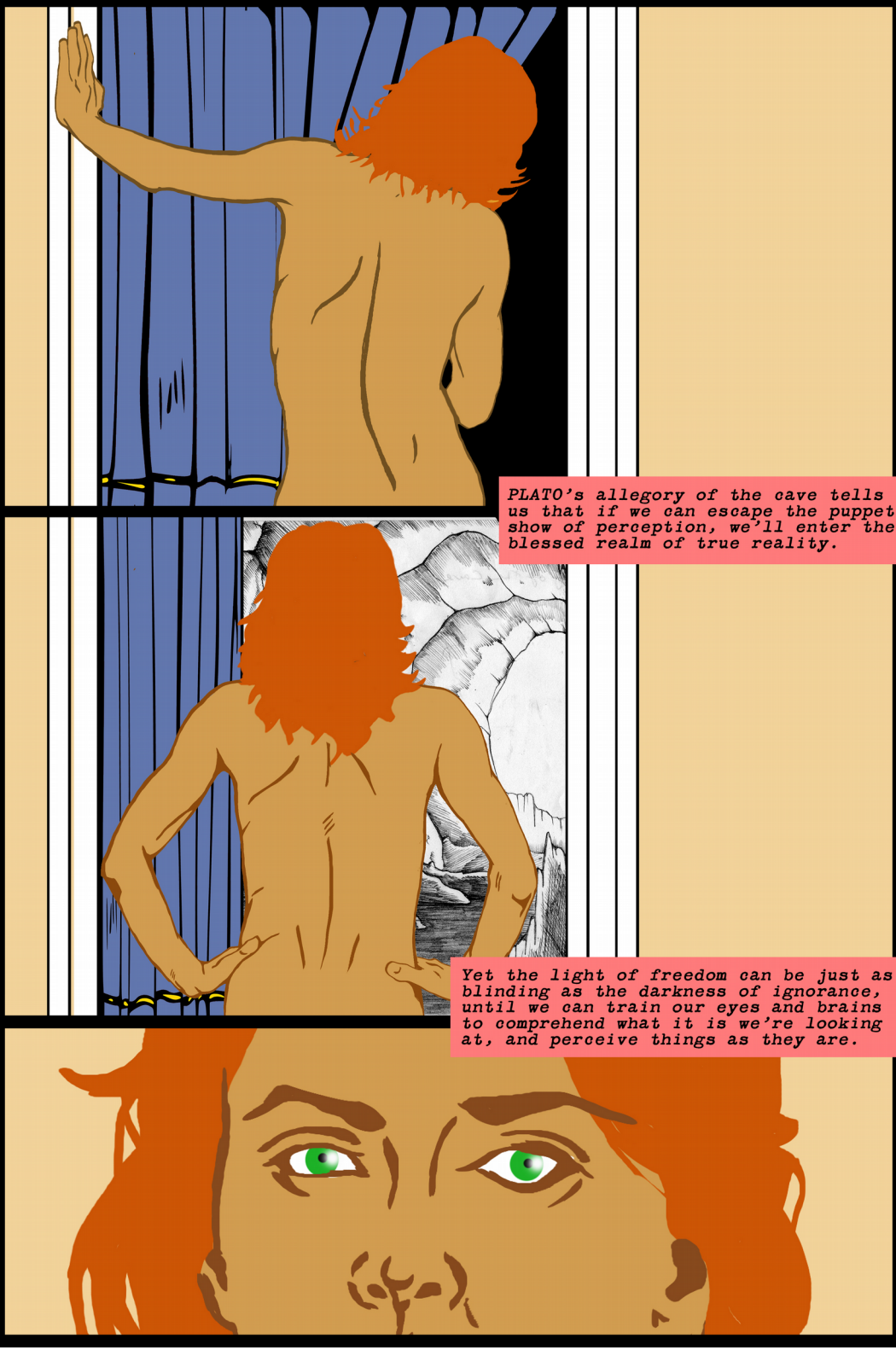
CHOMSKY
UNDERSTANDING POWER
Linda Nead
The Female Nude
John Berger
WAYS of SEEING
Judith Butler GENDER TROUBLE
Michel Foucault
A History of Sexuality
The Beauty Myth - Naomi Wolf
Donna Haraway ESSAYS
As it turned out, I was pretty rubbish at making art of my own, but I kept on doing it, in secret it felt like, just to redress the balance a bit.



I was more intrigued by the whole art historical discourse of what was "right" and "feminine", and what wasn't, which I figured had a huge influence on culture, society, and psychology. So I started reading everything I could get my hands on that dared to question norms, standards, and rules.

And that's when everything went political.

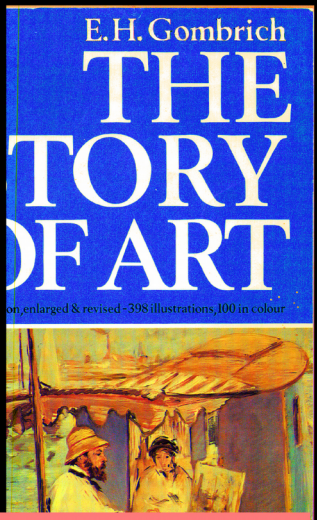

GOD AND THE STATE
"YOUR" REASON, BUT NOT MINE!
DIVIDE + CONQUER, EH?
WHO are right, the idealists or the materialists
The question once stated in this way hesitatio
becomes impossible. Undoubtedly the idealist
are wrong and the materialists right. Yes, fact
are before ideas; yes, the ideal, as Proudho
said, is but a flower, whose root lies in the ma
terial conditions of existence. Yes, the whol
history of humanity, intellectual and moral, political and s
cial, is but a reflection of its economic history.
All branches of modern science, of true and disinte
ested science, concur in proclaiming this grand truth, fu
mental and decisive: The social world, properly spe
short, humanity—is nothing other
development—at least on
ow—the highest manifestation
ry development necessa
base or point of depar
essentially the del
al element in man
ational as it is
because natural—


PLATO's allegory of the cave tells us that if we can escape the puppet show of perception, we'll enter the blessed realm of true reality.
Yet the light of freedom can be just as blinding as the darkness of ignorance, until we can train our eyes and brains to comprehend what it is we're looking at, and perceive things as they are.

Three weeks later: my first police record. 'Cos apparently slapping real nazis in the street isn't a legitimate form of protest against people who want to take away your right to legally exist in the country you were born in.

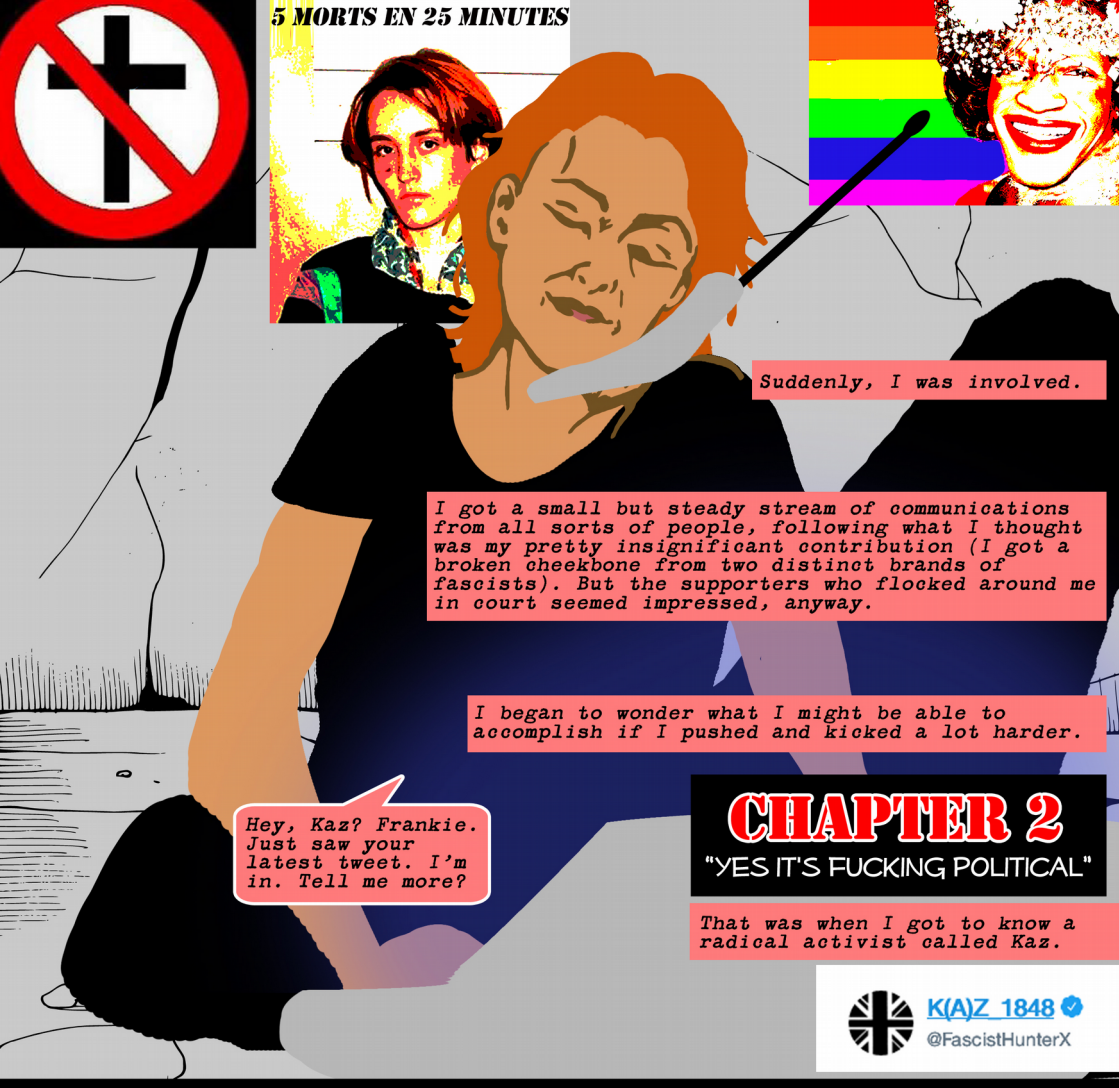
I took more of a beating from the fucking cops than I did from the EDL - as if some overweight skinheads were at grave risk from a screaming bitch with a placard who'd never hit anyone in her life.

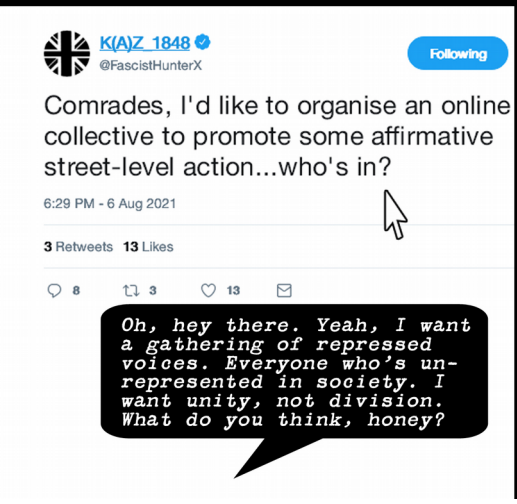
That day taught me everything I needed to know about power, how it was enforced, against whom, and why. Those who did not have it were not allowed to act as if they deserved it in any way.



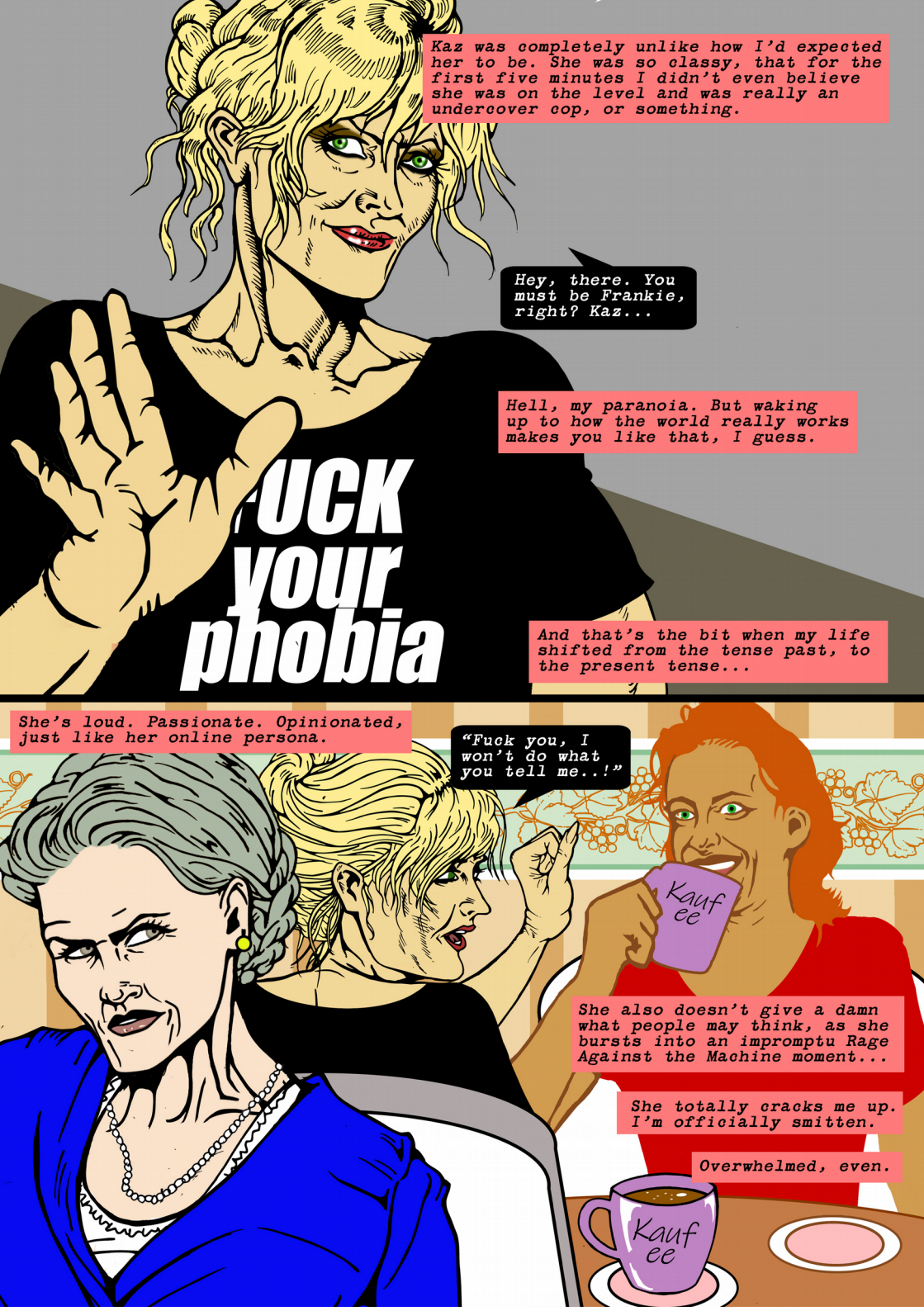
Had my day in court, dismissed through key witnesses not bothering to turn up (probably too embarrassed).

And all through that shit-storm of legal, bureaucratic subordination, I kept asking myself: how the hell did me hating my high school art history class lead to this?

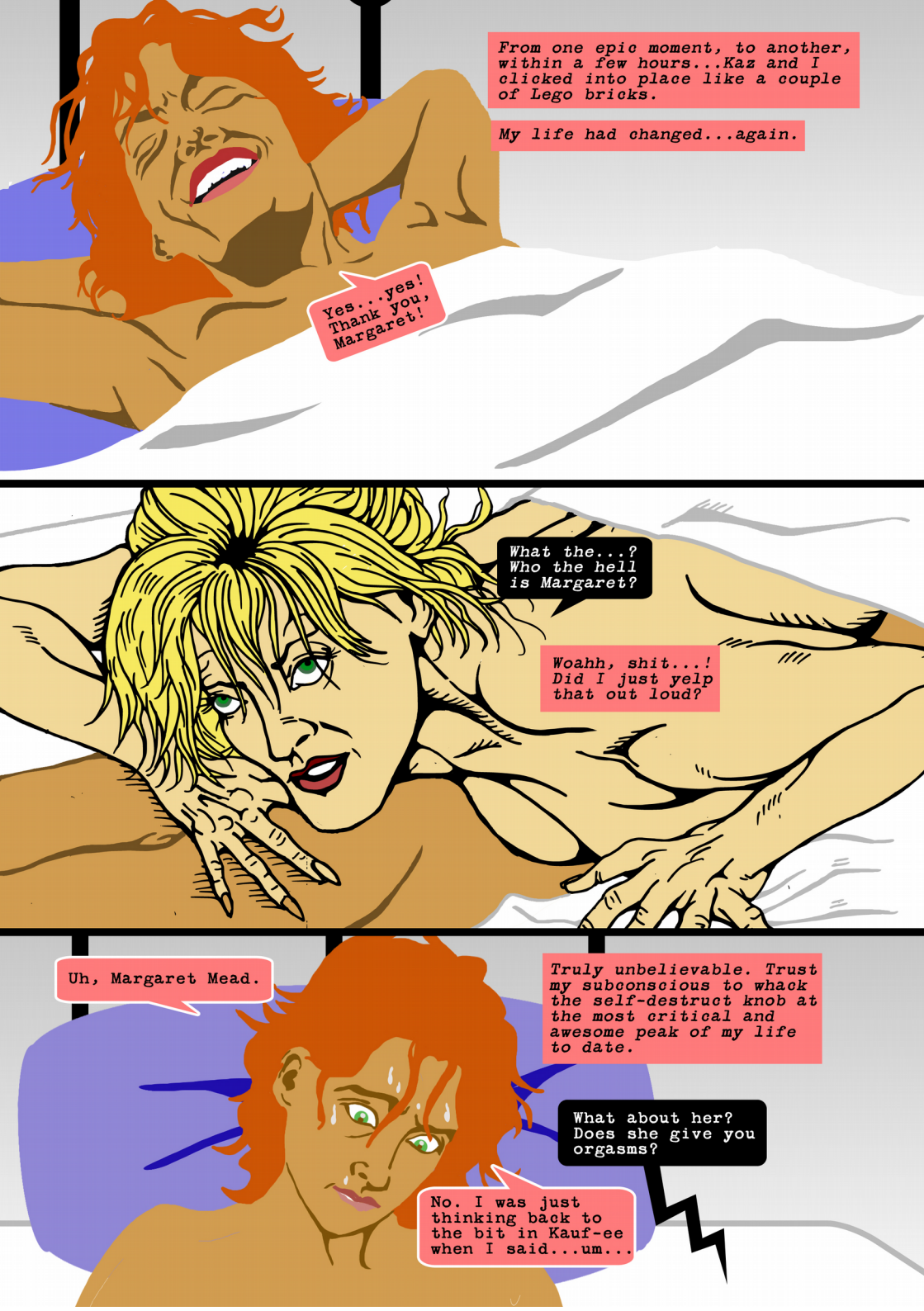

5 MORTS EN 25 MINUTES
Suddenly, I was involved.
I got a small but steady stream of communications from all sorts of people, following what I thought was my pretty insignificant contribution (I got a broken cheekbone from two distinct brands of fascists). But the supporters who flocked around me in court seemed impressed, anyway.
I began to wonder what I might be able to accomplish if I pushed and kicked a lot harder.
Hey, Kaz? Frankie. Just saw your latest tweet. I'm in. Tell me more?
CHAPTER 2
"YES IT'S FUCKING POLITICAL"
That was when I got to know a radical activist called Kaz.
K(A)Z 1848
@FascistHunterX

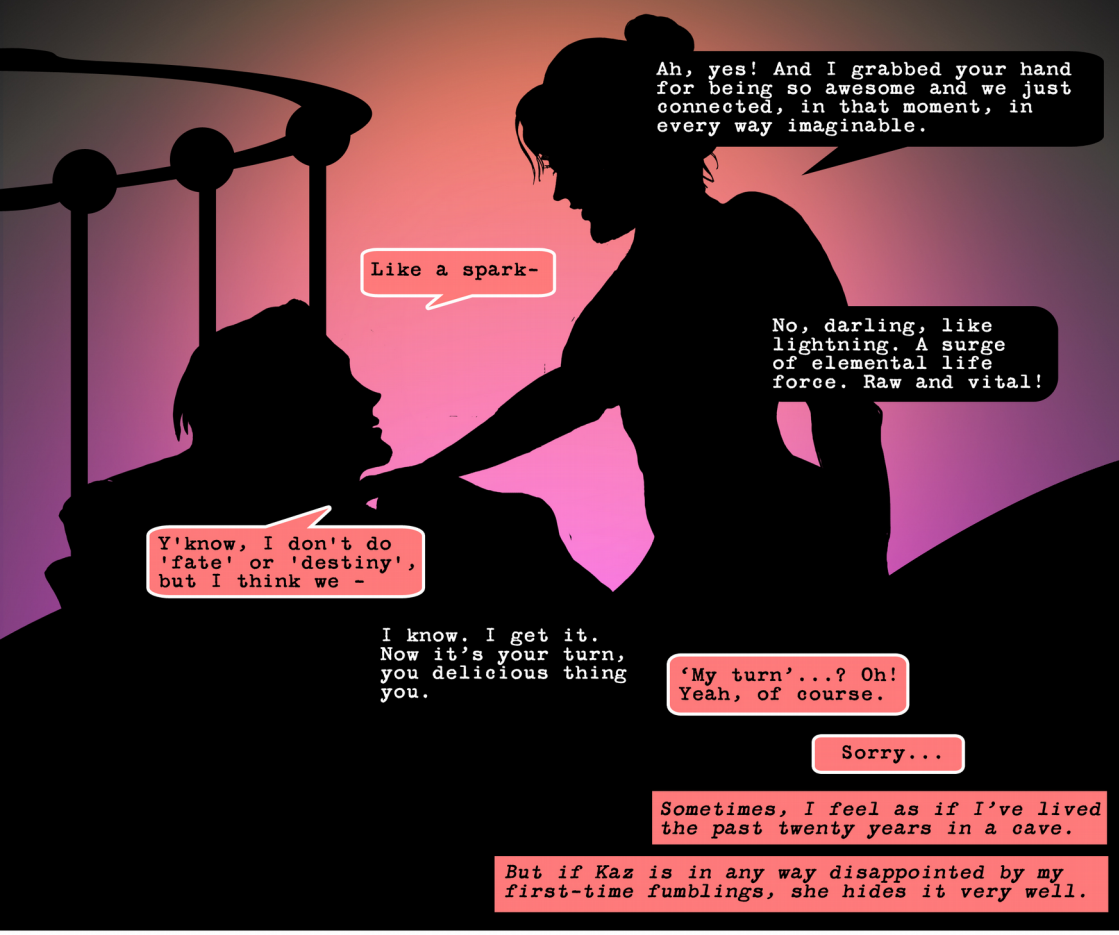

K(A)Z 1848
@FascistHunterX
Following
Comrades, I'd like to organise an online collective to promote some affirmative street-level action...who's in?
6:29 PM - 6 Aug 2021
3 Retweets 13 Likes
8
3
13
Oh, hey there. Yeah, I want a gathering of repressed voices. Everyone who's un-represented in society. I want unity, not division. What do you think, honey?

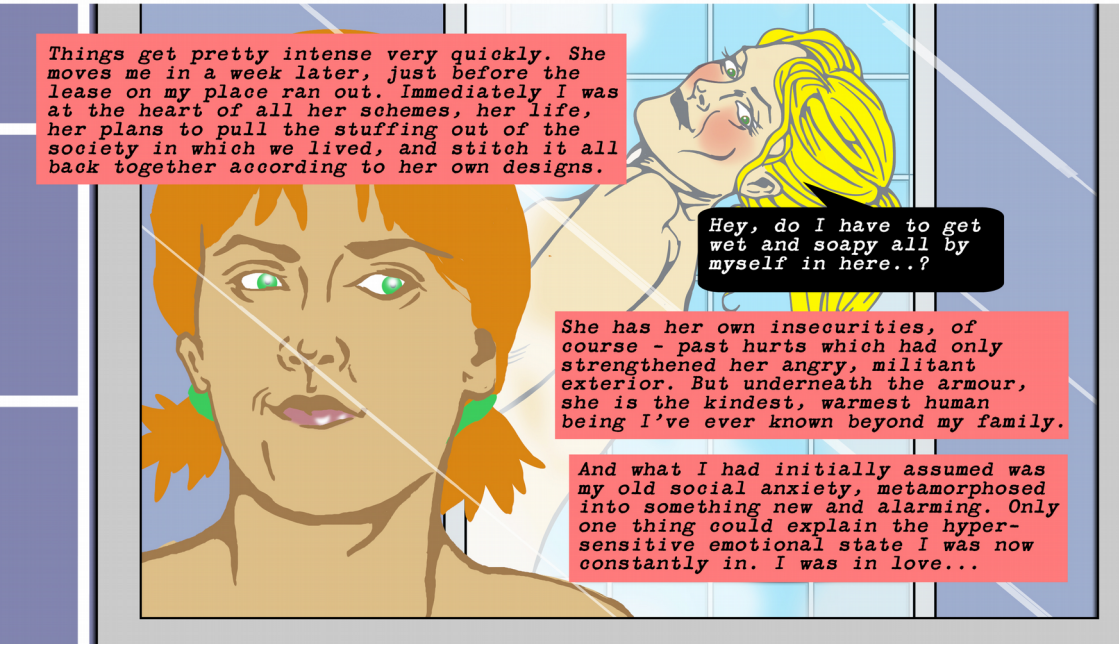
Hell yeah, unity is strength, and all that. Hey, we're seriously going to have to meet up sometime, y'know.
Oh, that'd be fab! Let's sort it for this weekend.


Kaz was completely unlike how I'd expected her to be. She was so classy, that for the first five minutes I didn't even believe she was on the level and was really an undercover cop, or something.
Hey, there. You must be Frankie, right? Kaz...
Hell, my paranoia. But waking up to how the world really works makes you like that, I guess.
-UCK your phobia
And that's the bit when my life shifted from the tense past, to the present tense...
She's loud. Passionate. Opinionated, just like her online persona.
"Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me..!"
Kauf ee
She also doesn't give a damn what people may think, as she bursts into an impromptu Rage Against the Machine moment...
She totally cracks me up. I'm officially smitten.
Overwhelmed, even.
Kauf ee

EXIT
So now that I've bored the living crap out of you about me, what about YOU, Frankie love..?
Suddenly, she makes me feel like I'm in an interview for a top job or elite university place. Her confidence, her commitment, her wit, all reduce me to an angry kid who is hilariously out of her depth.
On the spot anxiety attack squeezes my throat in a vice and increases perspiration production by 400%. The smart part of my brain shrugs its shoulders and goes for a walk.
Aw, hell...Me? Well. I guess -
For fuck's sake, pull it together, girl! She isn't going to punch your teeth in!
- I just want to be involved. To make a difference. Y'know?
Lame. She already knows that from our online chats. Looking bored now.
To be one of those few "thoughtful, committed citizens who can change the world...because that's the only thing that ever has", right?
Sunrise. BOOM! Thank you, Margaret Mead (even if I did somewhat mangle your words)...


From one epic moment, to another, within a few hours...Kaz and I clicked into place like a couple of Lego bricks.
My life had changed...again.
Yes...yes! Thank you, Margaret!
What the...? Who the hell is Margaret?
Woahh, shit...! Did I just yelp that out loud?
Uh, Margaret Mead.
Truly unbelievable. Trust my subconscious to whack the self-destruct knob at the most critical and awesome peak of my life to date.
What about her? Does she give you orgasms?
No. I was just thinking back to the bit in Kauf-ee when I said...um...


Ah, yes! And I grabbed your hand for being so awesome and we just connected, in that moment, in every way imaginable.
Like a spark-
No, darling, like lightning. A surge of elemental life force. Raw and vital!
Y'know, I don't do 'fate' or 'destiny', but I think we -
I know. I get it. Now it's your turn, you delicious thing you.
'My turn'...? Oh! Yeah, of course.
Sorry...
Sometimes, I feel as if I've lived the past twenty years in a cave.
But if Kaz is in any way disappointed by my first-time fumblings, she hides it very well.


Things get pretty intense very quickly. She moves me in a week later, just before the lease on my place ran out. Immediately I was at the heart of all her schemes, her life, her plans to pull the stuffing out of the society in which we lived, and stitch it all back together according to her own designs.
Hey, do I have to get wet and soapy all by myself in here..?
She has her own insecurities, of course - past hurts which had only strengthened her angry, militant exterior. But underneath the armour, she is the kindest, warmest human being I've ever known beyond my family.
And what I had initially assumed was my old social anxiety, metamorphosed into something new and alarming. Only one thing could explain the hyper-sensitive emotional state I was now constantly in. I was in love...

Hey, I need some kind of distinctive logo for this new group of mine. You used to study art history... interested in designing something that unifies our goals and philosophy?
Gee, sure. I've never done this kind of thing before, but I can try.
I trust you, honey. See you tonight!
She works part-time as a lecturer in Social Studies at the local University. I'm jealous of her students. If I'd had her as a teacher at high school, I would have aced every exam and become an Oxford professor by twenty-five.
Have a great day. Love you.
LUV
I guess there's still time, but I know I have more important things to do with my life now. Things that will benefit others as well as me.
It's time to get busy, and put all of my theory and anger into some kind of useful reality and repay all of Kaz's faith in me so far.

Thinking symbolically, our binary symbols can be read as simple, primordial schematics of primary sexual characteristics ---

1	RAGE
0	AGAINST
	THE
	MACHINE

The phallic "1" the/avoid "Ø" womb

Maybe some of this is a tad obvious/literal - but to paraphrase a commentator on Barthes' political/social art ought not to be complicated or obscure - you want the people to "get" your message - not to be confused by it!

A prison of binary gender definitions? Walls - invisible walls - which entrap us in certain modes of dress/behaviour/thought? The only person who can liberate us from these is OURSELVES!

While binary definition of gender is hardly from a biological and evolutionary psychology point of view (so that individuals know to distinguish potential mates), the human psyche is more complex than the purest "Either/Or" reductions allow - if Jung is correct in his "anima/animus" hypotheses then every human psyche is, to one extent or another, inherently bisexual (in terms of gender - NOT sexuality).

"Kick, push + otherwise engage vigorously against the PRICKS"

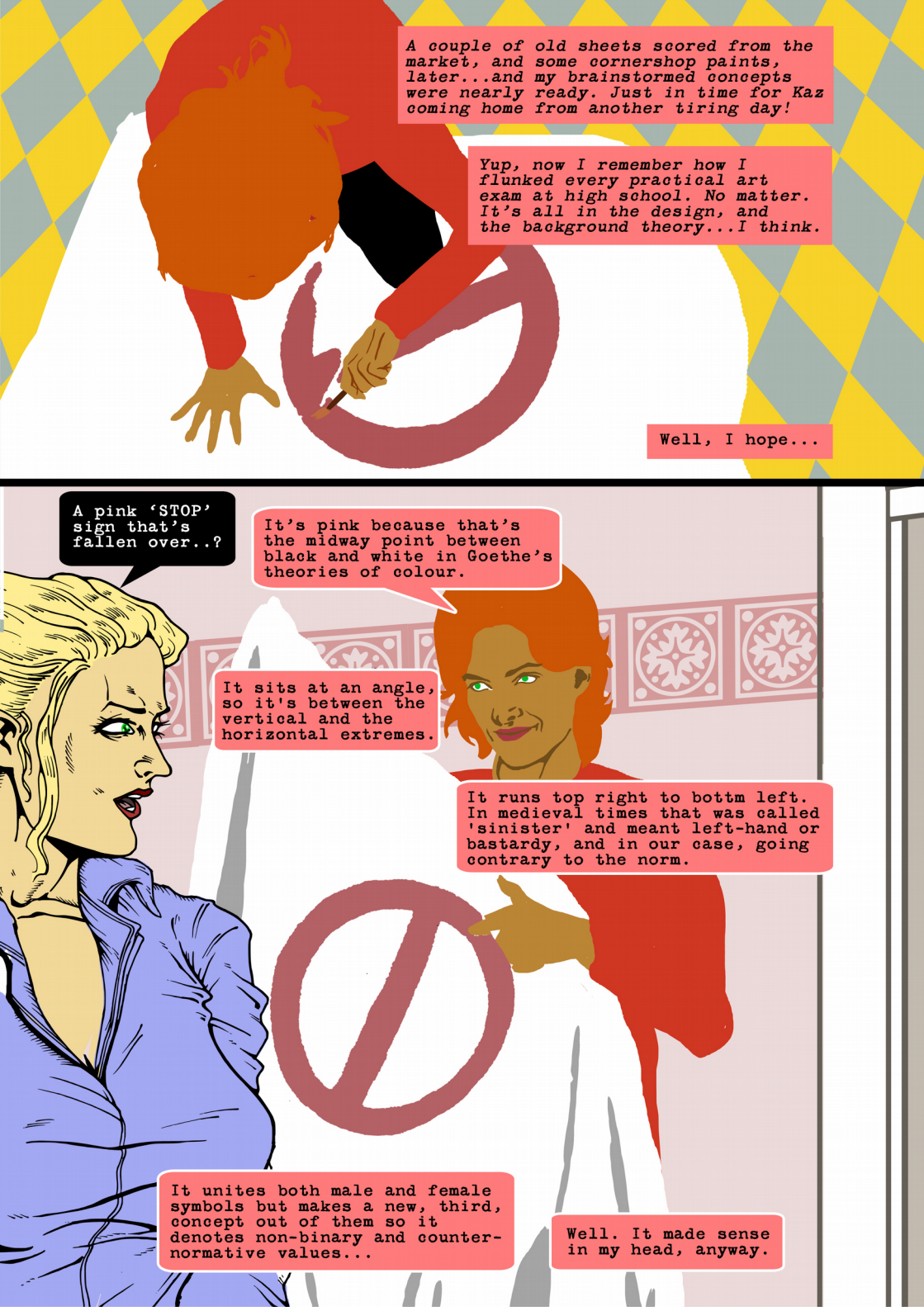
"1 or Ø?
=> "Binary"
≠ 1 or Ø
we write

"In-between" symbolism?

Suggestive of a computer's ON/OFF button?

Suggests a "NO ENTRY" sign?

"The circle is eternal and is divided into 2 signifying the unity of opposites.


A couple of old sheets scored from the market, and some cornershop paints, later...and my brainstormed concepts were nearly ready. Just in time for Kaz coming home from another tiring day!
Yup, now I remember how I flunked every practical art exam at high school. No matter. It's all in the design, and the background theory...I think.
Well, I hope...
A pink 'STOP' sign that's fallen over..?
It's pink because that's the midway point between black and white in Goethe's theories of colour.
It sits at an angle, so it's between the vertical and the horizontal extremes.
It runs top right to bottm left. In medieval times that was called 'sinister' and meant left-hand or bastardy, and in our case, going contrary to the norm.
It unites both male and female symbols but makes a new, third, concept out of them so it denotes non-binary and counter-normative values...
Well. It made sense in my head, anyway.

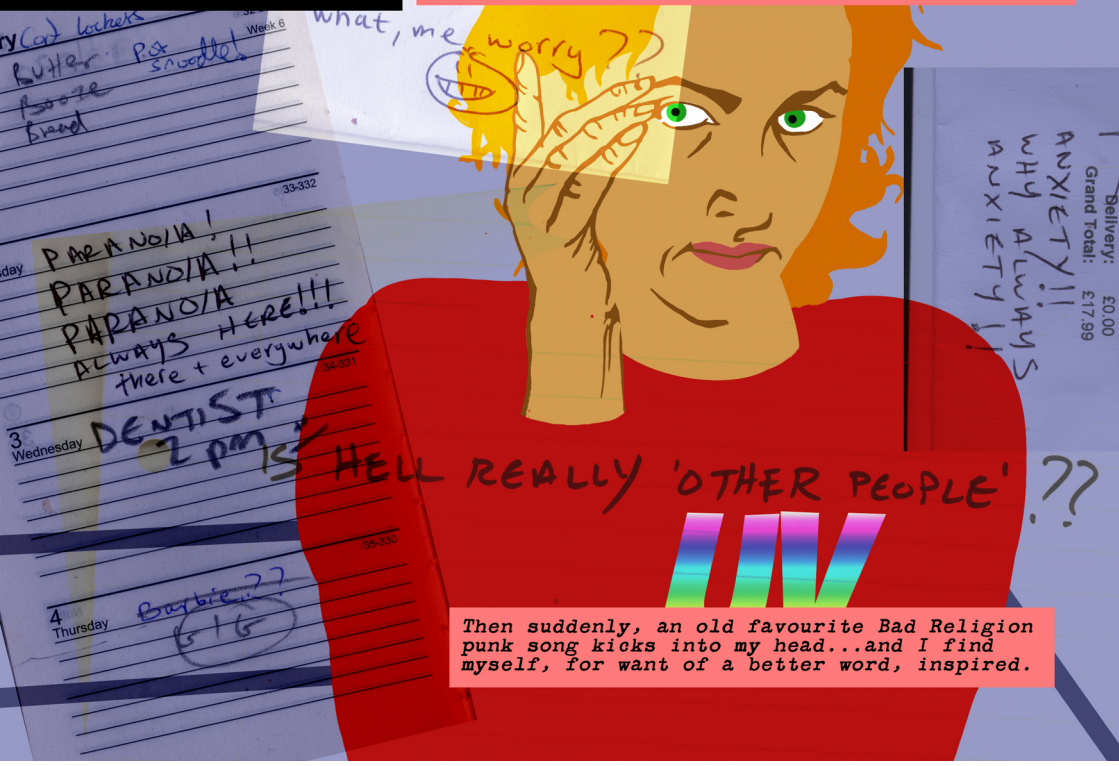
You're beyond awesome! I can't believe you managed to fit all that meaning into a circle and a line. This is it. Our symbol, our icon!
Thank you. I'll do you a better version tomorrow.
Like bollocks you will. It's perfect! I'll take pictures and get this up online now.
At least let me hang it straight first.
Her enthusiasm for all things pink and abstract leaves me seven shades of bemused, and wondering which one of us is the crazier.
How about getting it printed up on coffee mugs? Baseball caps? Socks? Mouse mats?
Kaz, nobody uses mouse mats anymore.
Cooking aprons? Dog shirts..?
By the end of the night we have an online shop, and a dozen T-shirts on their way to us...and I've also perfected the Mr. Spock eyebrow.

Now all we need is a name for the group. Any thoughts on that?
Was hoping you would tell me. It's your group.
No! Not any more. It's as much yours as mine now...uh, if you want it to be, that is..?
It'd be an honour, Kaz. But, I really got to go pee, OK?

CHAPTER 3

"ARMY OF ME"

What the hell was I getting myself into now? I suddenly feel as if Kaz is pinning so much hope on me. And yet I can't bear the idea of letting her down in any way. All my oldest fears begin to hit me like a flurry of hammers.

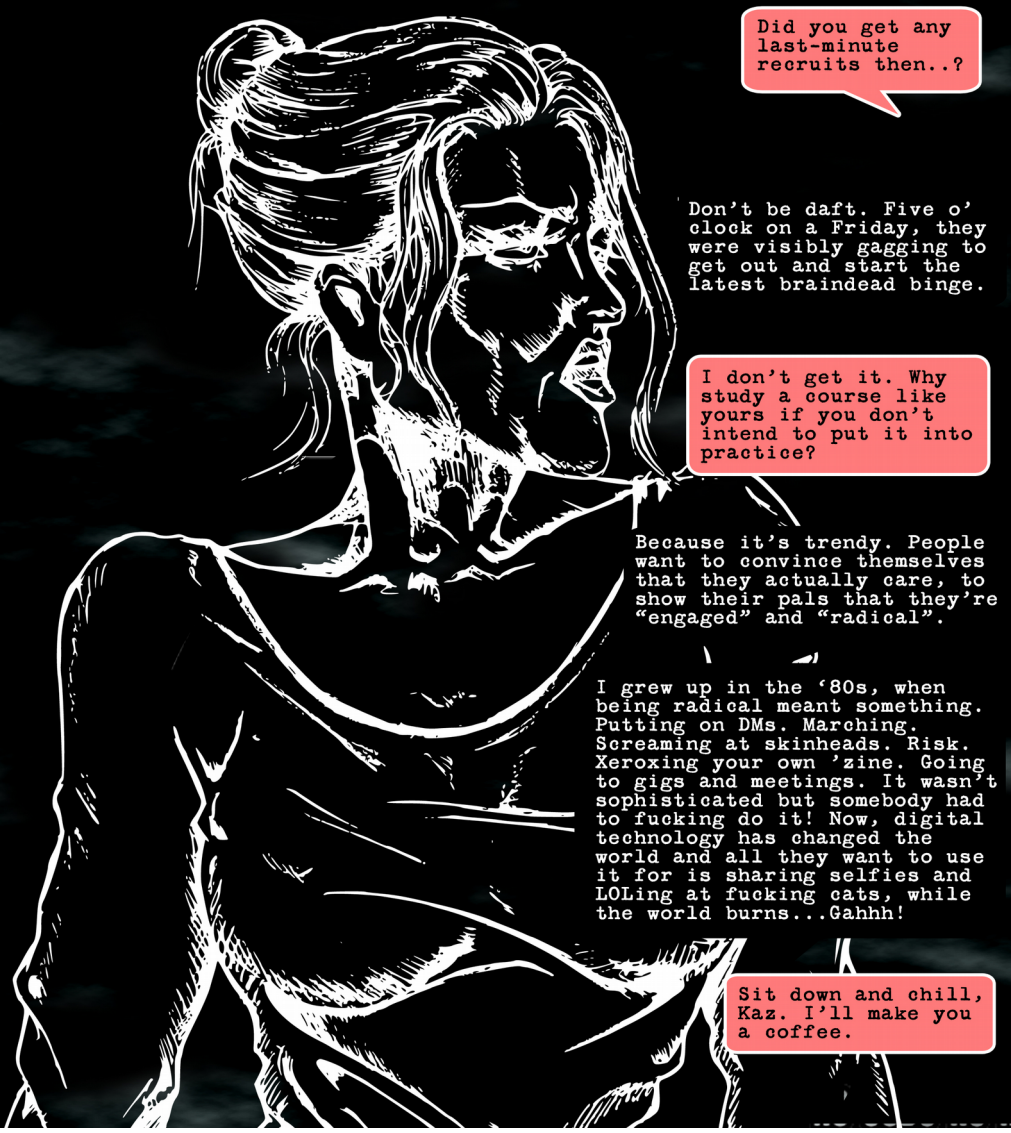


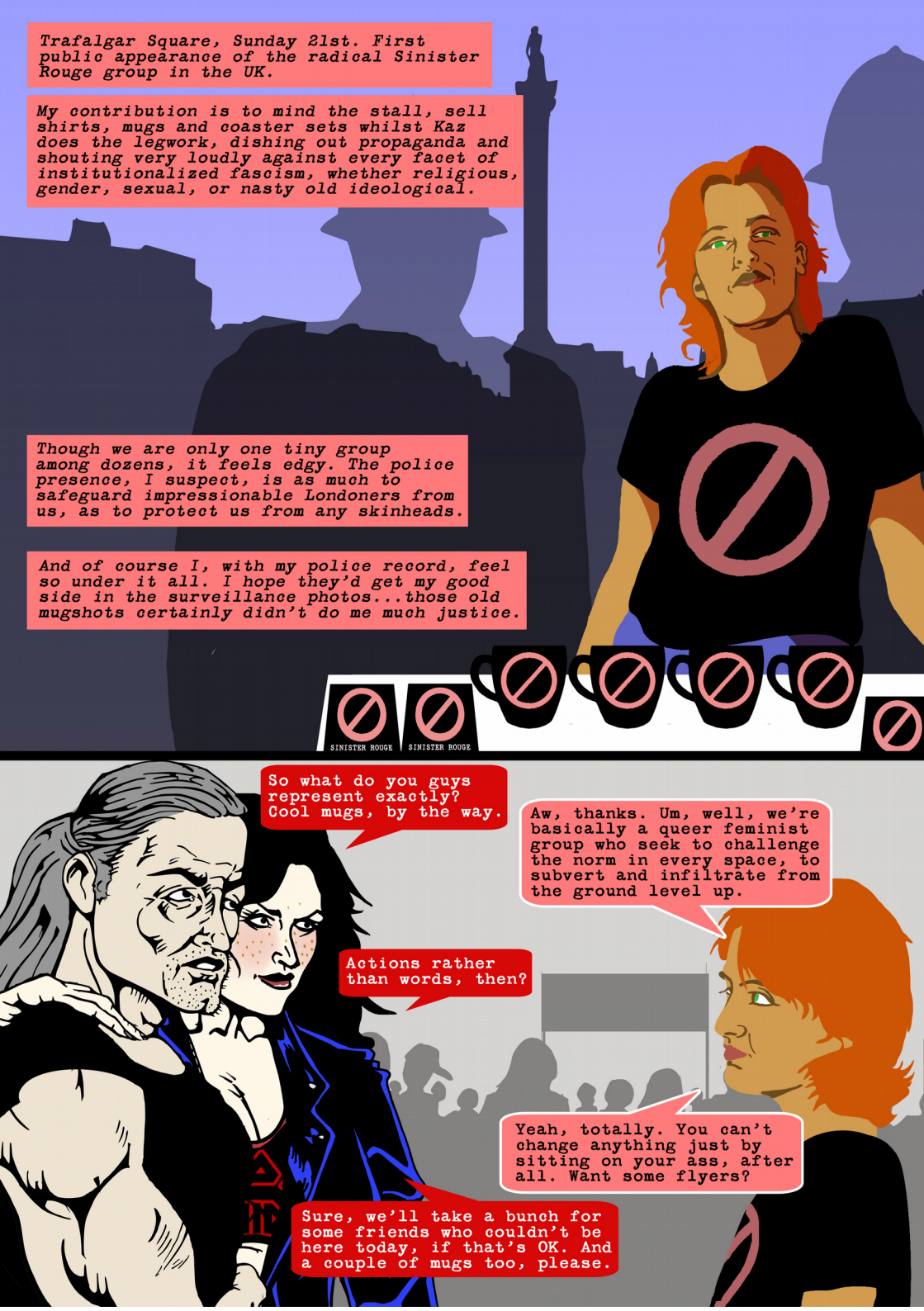
Then suddenly, an old favourite Bad Religion punk song kicks into my head...and I find myself, for want of a better word, inspired.

'Sinister Rouge'..?? Makes me think of Cambodia. Sounds dark and threatening.
That's what our opponents need to think. This ain't no party game, after all.
Oh hell no. And I totally get it. In fact, I think I love it, Frankie. It's perfect.
So, we have our stall at Anti-Fascist Action next Sunday. Which flyer design looks best to you?
I like the middle one.
I wish I had more members as smart and committed as you. There's a few online and a couple at the Uni have said they'll join us next week, but-
Hey, quality, not quantity. Radcal action scares people; they don't like to put their happy middle-class status quo on the line. Right?

OK Class...one final thing. If anybody is interested in making their voice heard against the powerful elite who seem to believe they know what's best for everyone, I'll be in Trafalgar Square this weekend. Because facism takes many forms, and I believe it must be fought, not in safe online protests, but at ground level, where it matters. Where real people interact in the real world, at the intersection of society, individual being, public awareness and the manifestations of power and control.

If I don't see any of you there, then...have a great weekend.


Did you get any last-minute recruits then..?
Don't be daft. Five o' clock on a Friday, they were visibly gagging to get out and start the latest braindead binge.
I don't get it. Why study a course like yours if you don't intend to put it into practice?
Because it's trendy. People want to convince themselves that they actually care, to show their pals that they're "engaged" and "radical".
I grew up in the '80s, when being radical meant something. Putting on DMs. Marching. Screaming at skinheads. Risk. Xeroxing your own 'zine. Going to gigs and meetings. It wasn't sophisticated but somebody had to fucking do it! Now, digital technology has changed the world and all they want to use it for is sharing selfies and LOLing at fucking cats, while the world burns...Gahhh!
Sit down and chill, Kaz. I'll make you a coffee.


Trafalgar Square, Sunday 21st. First public appearance of the radical Sinister Rouge group in the UK.
My contribution is to mind the stall, sell shirts, mugs and coaster sets whilst Kaz does the legwork, dishing out propaganda and shouting very loudly against every facet of institutionalized fascism, whether religious, gender, sexual, or nasty old ideological.
Though we are only one tiny group among dozens, it feels edgy. The police presence, I suspect, is as much to safeguard impressionable Londoners from us, as to protect us from any skinheads.
And of course I, with my police record, feel so under it all. I hope they'd get my good side in the surveillance photos...those old mugshots certainly didn't do me much justice.
SINISTER ROUGE
SINISTER ROUGE
So what do you guys represent exactly? Cool mugs, by the way.
Aw, thanks. Um, well, we're basically a queer feminist group who seek to challenge the norm in every space, to subvert and infiltrate from the ground level up.
Actions rather than words, then?
Yeah, totally. You can't change anything just by sitting on your ass, after all. Want some flyers?
Sure, we'll take a bunch for some friends who couldn't be here today, if that's OK. And a couple of mugs too, please.

Sales! People giving us money! And taking flyers - not just for themselves, but for others! Turns out the lady is called Fi and her other half is a bruising Swede named Od. I had always longed to be able to have a name I could chop down to just two or three letters...

Nice try, you dumb nazi fuck!

Kaz - whenever she decided to return from whatever amazingly cool, exciting mission into wherever the hell she had disappeared for the last few hours - would be so pleased with me.

But whilst freezing my ass off behind a stall isn't thrilling, it's all vital groundwork and networking. I even grab a picture of Fi for posterity - the very first outsiders to show an interest in Sinister Rouge.

We've arrived.
We are officially a movement.
It has begun...

TO BE CONTINUED...

IF YOU DON'T LIKE HOW THINGS ARE... DO SOMETHING TO CHANGE THEM!

THAT'S WHAT YOUNG FRANKIE DID WHEN SHE FOUND THAT SHE DIDN'T FIT INTO ANY OF SOCIETY'S CONVENIENT PIGEONHOLES.

NOT CONTENT WITH SIMPLY SHARING RADICAL OPINIONS ON THE INTERNET, SHE TEAMS UP WITH THE OLDER AND EVEN ANGRIER KAZ AND FINDS HERSELF A FOUNDER MEMBER OF HER OWN RADICAL ANARCHO-FEMINIST GROUP...AND THAT'S WHEN LIFE STARTS TO GET REALLY INTERESTING.

WELCOME TO THE FIRST PART OF A BRAND NEW GRAPHIC SERIES INSPIRED BY REAL, CURRENT EVENTS IN THE UNTIED KINGDOM, THAT NONE OF US CAN AFFORD TO IGNORE.

MORGAN BLACK IS A GENDER NONCOMFORMING ARTIST, WRITER + FILM-MAKER BASED IN DUNDEE. THEY ARE A MEMBER OF THE QUEER DOT, A DUNDEE ART COLLECTIVE AIMED AT AMPLIFYING QUEER VOICES AND PUNCHING NAZIS, AMONG OTHER COOL THINGS. FIND THEM BOTH ON FACEBOOK, EMAIL THE COLLECTIVE AT: THEQUEERDOT@GMAIL.COM, OR CONTACT M.B ONLINE AT: MORGANA-BLACKROSE.ARTWEB.COM

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